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LB 686

SPEAKER WITHEM: Thank you, Senator Chambers. Senator Kristensen, as there's been some debate, I will recognize you to close, if you care to, on the motion to advance.

SENATOR KRISTENSEN: Thank you, Mr. President and members of the Legislature. As opposed to Senator Chambers, this is the most responsible way to legislate. We could make and we could put in cement and try to determine today, in the absence of knowing what the lay of the land is going to be, and try to cement in winners and losers, we could try to do all these things and walk out of here and say, we did it. We could also walk away from these bills and not do anything. Both of those would be irresponsible, from my point of view. What this package of bills does is allow the flexibility to address an area that is changing daily. And we can't be in session year round to respond to this. We're going to have to put some trust in our Public Service Commission, who have the expertise and who are going to have to acquire even more expertise, to address the challenge that's coming, when we move from monopolies to a competitive market. This is the most profound change, since 1934, in the telephone industry. And my guess is that if we choose to do nothing, you will see phone rates drastically rise in some areas, if we do nothing. We've set up a framework with these two bills now to address that, which I think provide a safety net for the state of Nebraska, allow us to move quickly in response to whatever the federal rulings are, and whatever the benchmarks they have for universal service. And you should be able to go home to your constituents and say, we set up a framework that will protect you. It's not going to hold you harmless, but it's going to maintain the good, basic service that Nebraskans have enjoyed so far. Will some pay more? Perhaps, for basic service. Will some pay less for long distance and the business rates? Yes. But the key is that's because we've done something to protect them from wide swings. This is a bill that, if you walk out, any one particular telephone company is not going to like. There are things in all of these bills that they think is wrong, that they dislike and would like to change. But they also recognize the same thing that I've recognized, that the committee has recognized, and you now recognize, that if you don't do something, it is irresponsible, you will sacrifice people and their service. And I appreciate your patience. The committee, I really appreciate,